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Political Turmoil in Chinua Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah

Abstract: Chinua Achebe has articulated in his novels the confrontation between the African and the European societies. Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah exposes the main fundamental downfall of the Africa with regard its political turmoil, decolonization and harsh the reality of life circumstances. Achebe provides the required solutions to the problems encountered by them. The present study focuses on the political turmoil in general. The paper also analyses the need for democracy, the patriotism and political awareness to reclaim their legal rights to reshape their political structure to lead their meaningful existence in their own soil.

Key-words: Power-mongers, political turmoil, reformation and physical potentials.

Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah, a post-colonial fiction, was published in 1987 twenty years after the publication of his A Man of the People. The title of the novel is taken from a proverb about "anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the savannah about last year's bush fires" which may mean the resilience and defiance of the surviving ants that have fought against and withstood the bush fire. Moreover unmindful of the catastrophe that they have encountered earlier, the ants keep on building the anthills. They may stand as a monumental proof to the posterity and proclaim the world the colossal strength that they have possessed to face the hurdles and deception of life. It is no doubt that the novelist in due course of the novel has exposed the withstanding capacity of the indigenous people. They may represent the sense of dualism or the co-existence of the binary opposites that reign the thought and action of the Kangan society.

The power is misused in a similar way. The oft-repeated truism, absolute power corrupts the life style of Sam, His Excellency, and the President. Ever since he assumes office, all the democratic tenets fly out of the window of his luxurious office. His oppressive regime gags both his cabinet and the Man in the street. He is no longer the man who holds the 'yap and the knife', no longer the source of prosperity and security, but becomes like the fence that eats the field. The people of the African society become the victims of violence, injustice and victimization of both the European invaders and leaders of their own clan.

Chinua Achebe portrays Sam as a military dictator and inefficient leader and hence he relies on brute force, predominance and violence to project his leadership and power. He stands converting the state property into the property of private ownership to satisfy his private interests and materialistic pursuits. In short, he envisages a totalitarian and an authoritative government to trample the nation under

his foot. Anthills of the Savannah diagrammatically shows how politics and power are perniciously linked with each to deceive the gullible people.

The President presumes himself to be the king. His vested interest in clinging to power precludes the considerations for commoners. He expects his ‘commissioners’ to listen and ‘swallow’ his ‘rulings’, rather than question their validity. They don’t have the right to resign either. They could do it only at the risk of their lives. He pays no attention even to the existential needs of the people of Kangan. The deputation of elders from the Province of Abazon was turned away without conscience. Sam, who was angry with them for having turned down the Presidential referendum, proffers a lame excuse for it by telling them;

Tell them if you like, that I am on the telephone with the President of the United States of America or the Queen of England. Peasants are impressed by that kind of thing you know. (AS 17)

The protagonist’s interest in exposing the pomposity and power of his influenced position reveals a universal truth that his concern is not for the welfare of his people but his ownmaterialisti benefits and progress. From all these instances one can deduce that the post-colonial authorities and leaders who have an impact of western culture and education show signs of slowly breaking away from the indigenous culture and tradition. The people of native culture are very much marginalized, oppressed and humiliated by their own people. It is also due to the capitalist as well as consumerist enforcement of bourgeois values.

The novel shows all aspects of colonial process from the beginning till the end of the novel. Achebe addresses the courage; unbridled power of the natives and demonstrates how the pursuit of self interest has become a tremendous cost to the community as whole. This novel brings forth the aspiration of the educated youths who

wish to see rapid changes in their society but they realise later that it's their own culture and tradition which can lead to reformation and new social order. In his interview with Chris Searle, Achebe says:

Our leaders do not realize how quickly they become completely cut off. It does not take a year! You move in cars with gives and everybody clears the way to for you – they even pave the road for you before you make a visit. And if you are not careful you quickly loss touches. (60)

Chinua Achebe, the political democratic warrior, has a thirst for tradition of his African society, getting from the state of transformed to the state of ‘order’ which always had a rich and varied cultural heritage. The novel focuses on the validity of traditional life in addition to the values and the disruptiveness of change.

Achebe seems to suggest that the change is inevitable, and so wise man do reconcile with such radical and faster change. And so it is possible to show respect to English and Igbo together. He asserts that the people who resist and rebel are destined to be destroyed in the process. Trevor Royle in his book writes of change, writes about ‘The End of Empire in Africa’ that:

What is required, perhaps, is a realization that the rule of empire in Africa was not all bad; that government, trade and commerce were helped immeasurably by the participation of the white man and that in many African countries; it will have a role to play only when that happens can the process of decolonization be put into proper perspective. (61)

Achebe is critical about the state of Africa but at the same time he is quite clear that the Africans alone can describe their own country in a better way and offer elaborate information about its culture and people as well as the political, cultural and social deterioration faced by them. He admits that Africa which is the origin of various species

of mankind, can give much of its intellectual, physical and cultural potentials –abilities to make other countries feel proud of their borrowed victory.

The people of Kangan aspires for peace and change as they have been groping in darkness for a long time for liberation. But, their condition has become quite pathetic when they find it very difficult to organize and execute a suitable system of government. At the same time, the people of the Igbo society stand in unity in spite of differences that they have had among them. It is this spirit of unity that is very much applauded by Achebe. Hence, he envisages a new Africa which should be devoid of political corruption, class, creed and gender differences.

In identifying the instrument the reformation in Anthills of the Savannah, Achebe examines the relationship between power and knowledge and formulates the interpretive, advisory and non- benefactor role of the modern African writer. He simultaneously highlights the disintegration of political system in Africa.

The philosophical thought of Foucault will be employed in the analysis of Anthills of the Savannah because Achebe and Foucault both have a common reference to the societies based on the relationship between thought and liberty and also made similar statements about the operation of power and resistance in an indigenous society. The political turmoil in the society leads to power game, political assassination, feminist agitation and other unwelcoming state of affairs. It is all because Nigeria faces the period of transition from colonialism to post colonialism.

Achebe believes that the problem with political leadership particularly in Nigeria and Africa in general, is that it does not realise itself as a political constitution responsible for the upliftment of the society. Achebe consequently historicises the political subject in Anthills of the Savannah with a view to holding it responsible for the de-vitalization of the social body and at the same time, he wants to instill in the minds of the nations of the

Igbo society to honour, protect and retain the good old ways of the governance in order to retain the political and traditional values of their golden past.

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